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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000575

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (SIGNATURE)

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E,

LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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SUBJECT: HOW TO ESCAPE FROM ERITREA

ASMARA 00000575 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: CDA Matthew D. Smith for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: All young Eritreans have "a plan" for getting out of the country. Those who must leave illegally, however, face potential capture by Eritrean police and military from the early planning stages up to when they cross the border. Post compiled information from numerous sources, including people planning to leave Eritrea and the relatives of people who fled (both successfully and unsuccessfully), to gain insight on how people leave Eritrea illegally. END SUMMARY.

NATIONAL SERVICE) A LIFETIME COMMITMENT

¶2. (C) Eritrean 20-somethings experience an extremely hard life. The GSE conscripts the majority of Eritrea's youth into military service and gives them little hope for eventual demobilization, while the lucky ones receive training at one of Eritrea's technical schools. After graduation, technical school graduates must enter into open-ended civil service jobs at one of the government ministries or para-statal companies, where the Eritrean government pays them between \$3 and \$30 per month. Until Eritreans complete their national service requirement, the GSE will not allow them to obtain a passport or exit the country legally. The unending service requirement, lack of opportunity, slave wages, basic commodity shortages, and general feeling of hopelessness lead many young Eritreans to leave the country illegally in search of a better life.

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS WITH FACILITATORS

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¶3.

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) Fleeing Eritreans must first find a facilitator to make the arrangements. The GSE is very keen to break these human smuggling rings and dispatches agents to pose as potential customers. Other agents pose as facilitators, making all of the supposed smuggling arrangements prior to having the unsuspecting person arrested. Several Eritreans told Emboff about friends apprehended by GSE police shortly before attempting to escape. The GSE jailed these people from several months up to two years. The police usually send

AWOL soldiers back to their units where they are often severely beaten, according to many Embassy contacts. After finding a facilitator, a person waits for several weeks while the smuggler makes the final arrangements. One Embassy contact told Emboff that Eritreans living in Uganda and Sudan often act as go-betweens, in an effort to compartmentalize the ring's operations.

COST OF SERVICE

14. (C) The smugglers charge a non-negotiable price that has increased substantially over the past several years. The most expensive and reliable service costs \$4,000/person, and includes front-door service from Asmara to the Sudanese border. A less expensive (\$1,000/person) but more dangerous smuggling route originates in Tessenai, near the Sudanese border. GSE soldiers tightly control the roads leading to Tessenai, and Eritreans unable to prove completion of national service are usually not allowed near the city. Passage from Mendefera (30 miles south of Asmara) to Ethiopia costs \$1,000 to \$1,300/person. Eritreans living abroad often pay the fee for their relatives' escape in hard currency to banks outside Eritrea. Other Eritreans directly pay either the facilitator or the driver in local currency.

ONE SMUGGLING ROUTE EXPLAINED

15. (C) An Eritrean recently told Emboff about her sister's escape from Eritrea. A driver picked up the woman and took her to a safe house in Asmara, where she was later joined by fifteen other people. After several days, a different driver drove all fifteen people to another safe house in the small coastal town of Tio (150 miles southeast of Asmara). The smugglers issued the males Eritrean College of Marine Biology student identity cards, and instructed the men to present the IDs at checkpoints. The smugglers said the females did not need false IDs. After several days, a different driver drove the passengers north to Karora, a Rashaida village on the Eritrea/Sudan border. Along the route, the Eritrean military stopped the vehicle numerous times, where they checked and accepted the male passenger's fake ID cards.

ASMARA 00000575 002.3 OF 002

16. (C) The passengers waited in Karora for several days until 30 more smuggled Eritreans arrived. During this time, the villagers demanded money for the passengers' care and feeding, and implied they would inform GSE officials if they were not paid. A Rashaida villager eventually guided all 46 smuggled Eritreans across the Eritrea/Sudan border on foot. The guide left the Eritreans a few miles from the refugee camp, but told them to "walk toward the lights." The Eritreans said they encountered Sudanese police while walking to the camp, but they seemed strangely uninterested in the Eritreans' presence. All Eritreans making this particular journey arrived safely at the refugee camp.

SMITH